Do Not Be Afraid

Isaiah 41:8-13

"Do not be afraid." This is a message the Bible repeats again and again. We who believe in the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord of hosts, must not fear anything or any situation we encounter. Jesus also said, "Do not fear those whose breath comes from their nostrils," and "Do not fear those who cannot destroy the soul," encouraging us with these words. If the Lord is on our side, who can stand against us!

Ⅰ. Fear Prevents Proper Action

Whenever fear takes hold, it prevents sound judgment and right action. A clear example is the Japanese government's present handling of COVID-19. Their response has been slow, unable to give clear direction, and everyone senses this. Fear has gripped the government. Particularly within the Ministry of Health, there remains deep-seated fear born of bitter experiences with infectious disease measures.

Decades ago, the government strongly promoted vaccination to prevent cervical cancer. However, when the media sensationalized supposed side effects, the government was pressured into withdrawing its recommendation. Later investigations proved the reports were false, but it was too late. Even now, much of the public still distrusts the vaccine, ignoring the free shots available. As a result, about 10,000 women become infected each year and around 2,800 die. Many others have lost the ability to bear children or required hysterectomies. The Japanese public, infected by the virus of misinformation, has fallen ill with the disease of fear. Among developed nations, Japan alone largely ignores the cervical cancer vaccine, and consequently suffers the highest death toll.

This bitter experience became a trauma for the government and health ministry, preventing quick and decisive measures in response to COVID-19. Many Japanese people themselves distrust vaccines because of this history. (Currently, the cervical

cancer vaccination rate in Japan is only 0.6%.) Some even refuse the COVID-19 vaccine. The irresponsible media continues in the same manner.

Ⅱ. Fear Spreads

Fear spreads quickly and drags others into it, leading to collective panic. The media, desperate for ratings, keeps fueling fear—sometimes even fabricating stories, as with the cervical cancer vaccine. Such panic could have been avoided with calm, steady measures, but fear has already spread far. Emergency laws opposed by left-wing media, academics, and political parties should have been enacted much earlier. Now, the very people who opposed them accuse the government of being slow.

Pandemics have occurred repeatedly throughout human history, often killing millions. In earlier times, without modern medicine, the suffering was even more tragic. Yet humanity has survived.

We modern people value individuality, freedom, and human rights, and so we tend to view pandemics through that lens. But from the beginning, humans have been created as social beings. God sees not only each individual but also humanity as a whole. We too must see both from a personal perspective and as members of the human race. As Christians, we must work to break the chain of fear and stop its spread.

Ⅲ. Fear Is the Result of Sin

Originally, when humanity was first created, fear did not exist—because there was nothing to fear. There was reverence for God, but that is not the same as fear.

Fear entered the human condition only after sin separated people from God, death intruded, and the harsh rule of the devil became a reality. As trust in God diminished, so did the assurance of His protection and help, leaving life itself filled with anxiety.

Christians are those who have regained trust in God. By definition, we are people who live in faith. Yet because the sense of fear remains within us, the Bible must keep reminding us: “Do not be afraid.” We need to recall that God is on our side.

Ⅳ. Fear Properly

Christians who trust in God should not live in fear. Yet there is a sense in which we must "fear properly"—that is, to be cautious and live with prudence. In the case of COVID-19, this means avoiding the "three Cs" (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings), wearing masks, practicing hand hygiene, refraining from unnecessary outings, and especially avoiding crowds. Even if government measures are imperfect, Christians, as citizens, should still cooperate. To gather for meals without masks, drinking and shouting together, is absolutely inappropriate at this time.

Concerning cervical cancer, the Ministry of Health remains paralyzed by fear, issuing only hesitant statements even though the risks are clear. Yet girls from grade six through their first year of high school can receive the vaccine for free. Because three doses are needed, it is best to complete them early. After high school, each dose costs about 16,000 yen, nearly 50,000 yen in total. Still, it is worth it. Those who did not know this should take action quickly. (As a pastor, I had intended to speak about this years ago, but it slipped my mind. I sincerely apologize.) Please also inform young women and their families. Some mothers have died from cervical cancer contracted before childbirth. Recently, the National Cancer Research Center reported even a case of newborn lung cancer transmitted through amniotic fluid.

When I asked my daughter in California, she said that in the United States, women aged 16 and older are encouraged to undergo exams every year or two, screening for five different cancers of the reproductive system. There are also two types of vaccines available. Thus, even in America, with its weaker healthcare system, cervical cancer rates are not as high as in Japan. In Japan, modesty and shame often hinder such tests. Yet this is a matter of life and death. Proper caution can save lives. In the same way, influenza, bathing accidents among the elderly, and even choking on rice cakes claim many lives each year. With proper fear and careful measures, casualties can be greatly reduced.

Our ultimate assurance lies in God's sovereign care. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His knowledge. And we are worth far more than sparrows, loved and accepted by Him.

（ 注 ）

世界中の人たちが、なぜ日本人はマスクをするのかと不思議がっています。たしかにマスクは自分が感染するのを予防できません。しかし、自分が他人に感染させないようにするにはかなり役立ちます。そのために、「他人に迷惑をかけないことを大切な倫理と考える日本人は、必ずマスクをするのです。」現在でも、日本の病院のほとんどは――私の知る限りすべての病院で――院内マスク着用が求められ、忘れた人のためにマスクの自動販売機を置いている病院も沢山あります。

Note:

People around the world often wonder why Japanese people wear masks so consistently. It is true that masks do not strongly prevent the wearer from becoming infected. However, they are quite effective in preventing the wearer from infecting others. For this reason, Japanese people—who value the ethic of "not causing trouble to others"—will always wear masks. Even now, in nearly every hospital in Japan (in fact, as far as I know, in all hospitals), masks are required, and many facilities provide vending machines for those who forget to bring one.